

After the wool was carded, it was spun into yarn on a large wheel and wound into coils called skeins. Before 1810, women and girls, using their own wool from their own sheep, generally did spinning in the home. To lighten the task, women sometimes got together for spinning. In 1769, Mary Cooper wrote, “girls gone to the spinning frolic.”¹ After 1810, spinning mills took over the bulk of the spinning, again lightening the workload of the women and girls. It is important to note, though that some spinning continued to be done in the home. Delia Denison writes in her journal in 1883, “Thursday: to day I spun 7 or 8 knots.”¹

Next the skeins of spun wool could be dyed with dyes made from barks, nuts, flowers, roots, or plants that were close at hand. The women would tend the wooden dye tub or kettle over an open fireplace. Children would help in this process by tending the fire, bringing wood or water, and sometimes hanging the dyed skeins up to dry.

The colored yarn was then woven into cloth on a large loom. The weaving was the task that was most likely to be performed by a skilled person, paid for his labor, rather than a member of the family. A factory owner in Milton was ready to pay folks, whether they were weavers by trade or a farmer’s wife who knew how to work a loom well:

Weavers who can produce satisfactory recommendations may be supplied with COTTON YARN from No. 12 to 16, to be made into plain shirting’s and sheeting’s. Terms will be made known by applying at the Milton Cotton Factory.

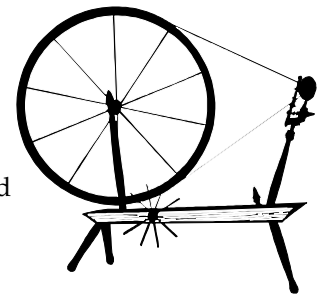
Jabez Burrows¹

After the cloth was woven, it was fullled or pulled. Everyone in the family sat around the table while pulling, pushing, and twisting the fabric. This process helped make the cloth shorter, thicker, and stronger.

After fulling, the cloth was sewn into dresses, pants, and coats. This was done both by the women of the house and by hired tailors.

In conclusion, the best evidence we have about the spinning and weaving of wool in Saratoga County is taken from E. J. Huling’s reminiscences. (Note the season he refers to in this passage.) Huling was born in 1820 on a farm near the Stone Church in the Town of Milton. Many years later he wrote:

In the fall . . . the women folks . . . had ample time to spin flax and wool, both of which were woven in looms in the house. The tow of the flax was spun and woven for grain bags, straw ticks, and some rough species of clothing, while the yarn of the flax was woven into thread or woven for towels, sheets, or other uses. The woolen yarn was knit into stockings, mittens, etc., or woven into flannels, some of which was made up as it came from the loom into sheets or blankets, other portions were colored red for wear in the family, while some was taken to a factory in the vicinity where it was made into pressed flannel for the women’s dresses, or colored and fullled for the men’s wear. In the fall or winter a tailor came to the house and made up the fullled cloths for the men and boys. ¹



¹ Emily Warren Roebling, Journal of the Rev. Silas Constant (Philadelphia, 1903).

¹ Jacquette Haley & Field Horne. Household Inventories of Westchester County 1670-1795 (Tarrytown, 1977), 91.

¹ Independent American. May 2, 1809.

¹ Field Horne. The Diary of Mary Cooper: Life in a Long Island Farm 1768-1773 (Oyster Bay, 1981).

¹ Delia Denison Diary: April 1883 to August 1885 (Town of Galway Bicentennial Publication, 1992).

¹ Saratoga Republican, September 9, 1813.

¹ E. J. Hulings. “Some Reminiscences of Life and Times Since 1828.” Reprinted in The Grist Mill. XVII:2 (May, 1983) pp. 2-4.